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ABSTRACT

This booklet argues against the use of school bird-hatching projects, citing a variety of environmental and ethical concerns about such projects. Alternative resources and suggestions for alternative activities are presented. (WRM)

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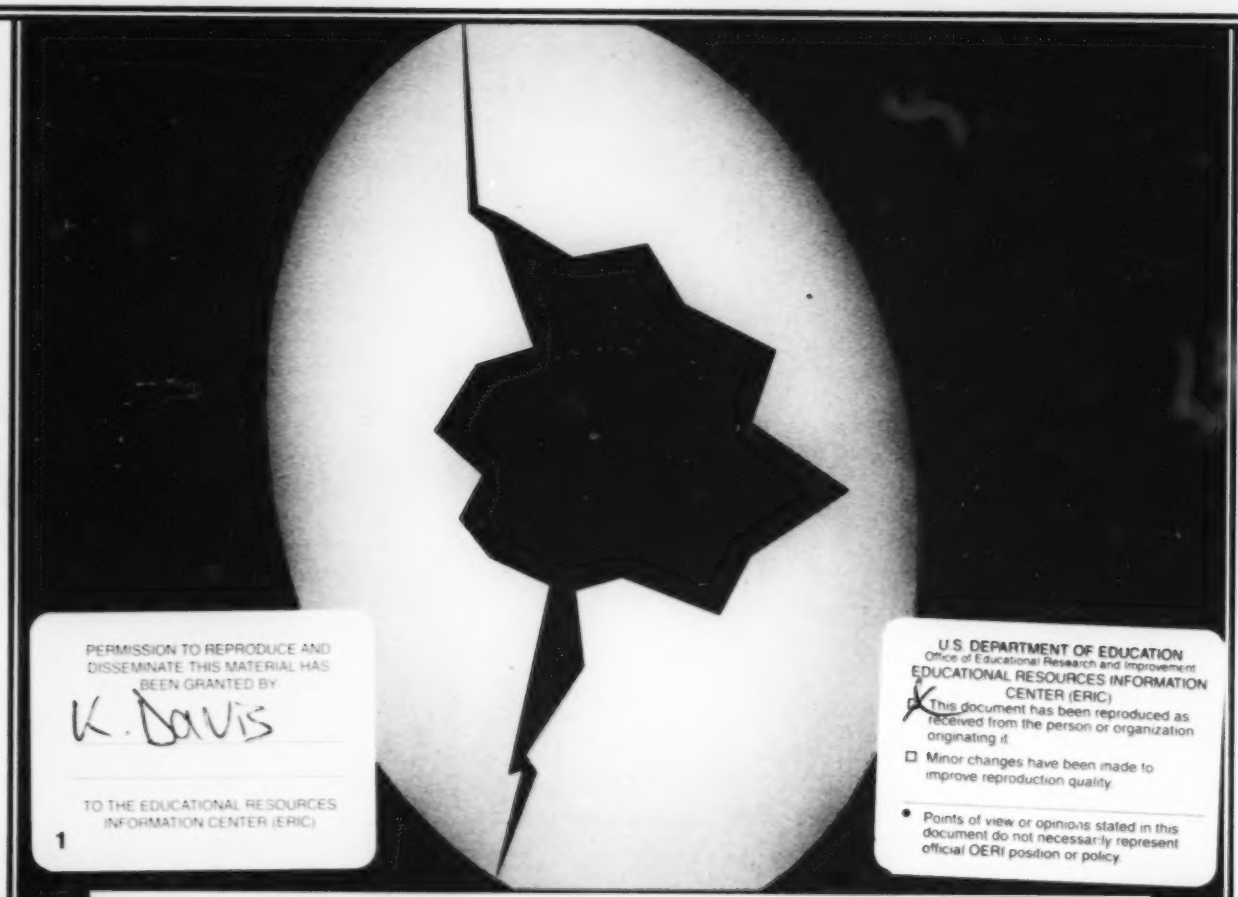
Replacing School Hatching Projects:



Alternative Resources & How to Order Them

ED 433 211

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The Problem

The Needs Of Developing Birds Are Not Likely To Be Met

Every year, kindergarten and elementary school teachers and their students place thousands of fertilized eggs in classroom incubators to be hatched within three or four weeks. These birds are not only deprived of a mother; many grow sick and deformed because their exacting needs are not met during incubation and after hatching. Body organs stick to the sides of the shells because they are not rotated properly. Birds are born with their intestines outside their bodies. Eggs can hatch on weekends when no one is in school. The heat may be turned off for the weekend

Matt Kelly

causing the embryos to become crippled or die in the shell. Commercial suppliers' eggs hatch an abnormally high number of deformed birds reflecting the limited gene pool from which they derive. Some teachers even remove an egg from the incubator every other day and open it up to look at the embryo in various stages of development, adding the killing of innocent life to the child's education.

When the project is over, these now unwanted birds may be left in boxes in the main office for many hours without food, water, or adequate ventilation waiting to be collected for disposal. The school system does not even provide a budget for the veterinary care and treatment of birds and other animals who are used in the classroom. That this lesson sinks into students is shown by the decision of millions of adults each year to "get rid of" a sick, injured, or crippled "pet" rather than pay for veterinary treatment.

Good Homes Cannot Be Found . . . And The Problem Is Getting Worse

Because a child bonds naturally with infant animals, students and even some teachers are misled to believe that the surviving birds are going to live out their lives happily on a farm, when in reality, most of them are going to be killed immediately (most working farms do not add school-project birds to their existing flocks for fear of importing germs), sold to live poultry markets and auctions, fed to captive zoo animals, or left to die slowly of hunger and thirst as a result of ignorance and neglect. Commercial egg suppliers routinely send returned hatching-project birds to slaughter. Baby quails may be used for hunting and hunting-dog practice or recycled into repetitive "nutrition deprivation" experiments. As one egg supply farm explained, "We don't tell the school and kids the truth because they become emotionally involved. The emotional involvement of people goes beyond our counselling capacity."

Some children do learn the truth, however. At a special education school in New York City, for example, the custodian flushed deformed live chicks down the toilet, while at another special education school, the teacher twisted the deformed chicks' necks and then flushed them—significant lessons for children who are themselves disabled.

School hatching projects increase the number of animals no one is asking for – those millions of precious creatures, including classroom chickens and other birds, whom we pay people to "euthanize" each year or whom a parent may reluctantly take on, usually temporarily. School hatching projects encourage students to desire to repeat the classroom experience by producing unwanted litters of puppies and kittens. After all, aren't we assured that a "farm" or a "shelter" will absorb our castoffs?

Each year, animal shelters across the country are confronted with unwanted chicks, ducklings, quails, even turkeys and ostriches, many of them ill, from educators who never thought of the fate of the birds, or could not find homes for them, adding to the tremendous burden already borne by the shelters. Surely there are enough

animals who need homes already without adding to the population and perpetuating the behavior that is responsible for the problem.

Increasing urbanization enormously compounds the problem. Residential zones ban the keeping of domestic fowl, while even people who can provide a good home can accommodate only so many male birds. Normal flocks have several female birds to one male. Roosters crow before dawn and during the day. (Crowing is part of the complex visual and communication system evolved in the chickens' jungle habitat.) Unfortunately, half of all chickens born are males.

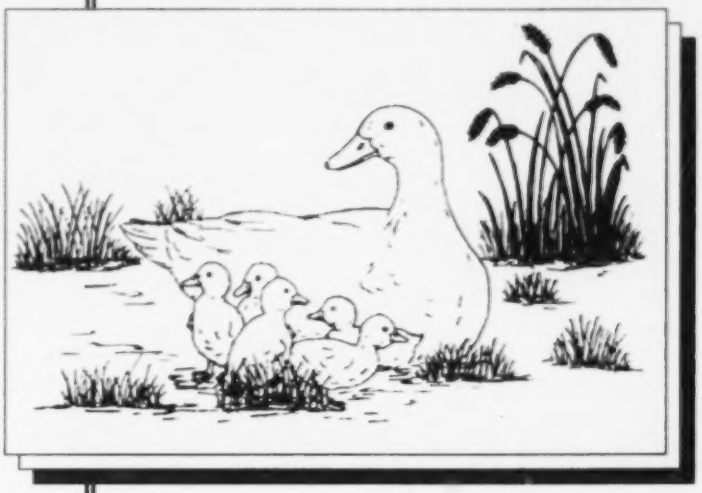
The Lesson Never Taught: Chickens, Ducks, and Quails are Marvels of Nature

The lesson never taught is that chickens, ducks, and quails are marvels of nature. These birds are energetic foragers with excellent eyesight, strong legs and other features that enable them to find their own plants, seeds, and insects with expertise. Japanese quails mate for life and have strong migratory instincts that are totally frustrated in captivity. Ducks need water not only to drink and swim in, but to ensure the health of their eyes with constant rinsing. Chickens and turkeys have an inborn need to range and be social. Ostriches and emus have a strong family life in which both parents play an active role in the nesting, incubation, protection and teaching of their young.

Hatching project birds have real mothers and fathers . . . somewhere. A mother hen turns each egg carefully as often as 30 times a day, using her body, her feet, and her beak to move the egg precisely in order to maintain the proper temperature, moisture, ventilation, humidity, and position of the egg during the 3-week incubation period. Embryonic chicks, ducklings, quails, turkeys, ostriches and emus respond to soothing sounds from the mother hen. Chicken embryos respond to warning cries of the rooster. Two to three days before the baby birds are ready to hatch, they start peeping to notify their mother and siblings that they are ready to emerge from the shell, and to draw her attention to any distress such as cold or abnormal positioning. A communication network is established among the baby birds, and between the baby birds and their mother, who must stay calm while all the peeping, sawing, and breaking of eggs goes on underneath her. As soon as all the eggs are hatched, the hungry mother and her brood go forth eagerly to eat, drink, and explore.

Instead of teaching these valuable lessons, school hatching projects ***mislead*** children to think that artificially incubated birds come from machines with no need of a mother or a family life. They do not perceive the parents' role in nestmaking, incubation, protection, care and teaching of their young. Supplemental facts, even if provided, cannot compete with this barren, mechanistic, and decontextualized classroom experience which gets passed on from one generation to the next. For example, a teacher whose students hatched an ostrich in class mistakenly told the newspaper that the only thing baby ostriches learn from their parents is "the pecking process."

Millie Holderread



Meaningful, Humane, Creative Replacements Are Needed

School hatching projects teach children (and teachers) that bringing a life into the world is not a grave and permanent responsibility with ultimate consequences for the life created. Elimination of this destructive idea from our schools is a practical extension of the socially responsible atmosphere we are trying to create for our children, including respect for the family life of all creatures. Hatching projects need to be replaced with creative programs including colorful books, filmstrips, videos, computer programs, and plastic models that demonstrate the embryonic process in the major stages of development of a bird inside an egg. Easily-adapted programs are already in use in other areas of biology and can be adapted to hands-on instruction based on materials that do not entail the repetitive generation of living beings for a terminal procedure. Educators can help by urging educational supply companies to develop alternative programs, and by pur-

chasing existing alternative programs, creating a demand.

In addition, an understanding of the natural life of chickens, ducks, and quails incorporating the fact that they are birds can be encouraged by quietly observing a nest of wild birds including pigeons, sparrows and other birds who have adapted to city life. Field trips to places where ducks can be seen swimming and chickens can be seen socializing, sunbathing, dustbathing, foraging and enjoying themselves outside will help students to see these birds in a sensitizing and appealing perspective. Field trips with the local Audubon Society or other local nature study organizations can incorporate holistic projects in which students observe the fascinating ecology of many kinds of birds.

Dana Baird

you are helping to build a society in which it will one day be considered unthinkable to generate a living being simply as an experiment. If young children are "excited" by classroom bird-hatching projects and the production of litters of puppies and kittens, this is because they are innocently bonding with these baby animals without understanding the true situation. Most of the animals do not have a happy (or any) life ahead, and multiple unwanted offspring result from those who do. The majority of children who learn the truth are emotionally traumatized and justifiably feel betrayed.

What Educators And Others Can Do

If a hatching project is being considered at your school, please use an alternative project, or urge the science curriculum coordinator or whoever else is responsible to use a replacement that respects the life, feelings, and family life of all creatures. In doing so,

Karen Benzel

you are helping to build a society in which it will one day be considered unthinkable to generate a living being simply as an experiment. If young children are "excited" by classroom bird-hatching projects and the production of litters of puppies and kittens, this is because they are innocently bonding with these baby animals without understanding the true situation. Most of the animals do not have a happy (or any) life ahead, and multiple unwanted offspring result from those who do. The majority of children who learn the truth are emotionally traumatized and justifiably feel betrayed.

Alternative Resources

Books In Print

Egg: A Photographic Story of Hatching. K-12. Text by Robert Burton. Photographs by Jane Burton and Kim Taylor. This beautifully crafted and enticing book shows chickens, ducklings, ostriches and other birds, reptiles, fish, and insects developing inside and hatching from an egg. It shows how animals breathe inside eggs, how chicks within shells "talk," and how baby caterpillars can be bigger than the shell they pop from. It "captures the very moment of hatching in extraordinary close-up photographs—from the first crack in the eggshell to the newborn bursting free." Color. Pub. Dorling Kindersley: 888-342-5357. Order for $13.95 per book. ISBN: 1-56458-460-7.

A Home for Henny, by Karen Davis. Illustrated by Patricia Vandenbergh. K-4. This is the story of a 3rd-grade child's experience with a classroom chick hatching project and her subsequent friendship with Henny, the hen, whom she adopts when the project is over. This project, which at first seems like

a good idea, has unexpected consequences. Melanie, the little girl, saves a chick who is about to be disposed of and gives her a loving home. However, following a near-fatal disaster, she and her parents decide that Henny would be safer at a sanctuary.

A Home for Henny illustrates the problems with school hatching projects while evoking the behavior and personality of a chicken. Though technically a work of fiction, the story is based on real events and the author's personal experience with chickens. Order from United Poultry Concerns, P.O. Box 150, Machipongo, VA 23405. Ph: 757-678-7875. $4.95 incl. shipping.

Goosie's Story, by Louise Van Der Merwe. Illustrated by Ros Nel. Grades 3 & up. *Goosie's Story* is about a battery hen who is given a chance to lead a normal life. We share her belated discovery of the world and realize that, far from being a mere unit of production, she has a robust ability to live life to the full. This moving book will be warmly welcomed and shared by children, parents and teachers, highlighting as it does the concern and compassion we ought to feel for our fellow creatures on this earth. Order from United Poultry Concerns, P.O. Box 150, Machipongo, VA 23405. Ph: 757-678-7875. $4.95 incl. shipping.

The Rooster's Gift, by Pam Conrad. Illustrated by Eric Beddows. Ages 4 to 8. This Rooster has a Gift. Every morning he climbs to the top of the chicken coop and calls out his song. And like magic, the sun comes up. All the animals on the farm – especially Smallest Hen – are impressed. But one morning Rooster sleeps in, and the unheard of happens. The sun rises without him! How could this be? What is his Gift, if it's not to bring up the sun every day? The proud rooster has to learn what really makes him special. This story artfully conveys a human situation with chickens who look, vocalize, and act like chickens. The patch of earth they live on is pictured as part of a round planet. "Veteran author Pam Conrad's delightfully funny and heartwarming tale of self-affirmation is gloriously brought to life with Eric Beddows' rich illustrations." A Laura Geringer Book published by HarperCollins. $5.95. ISBN: 0-06-443496-6.

Library Shelf *(Currently Out Of Print)*

Chester the Chick. Story and photographs by Jane Burton. (1988) K-6. A lively informative book that follows a zesty male chicken during his first year of life as he grows inside the egg, hatches, learns to peck for food, plays with his sister and other chicks, and develops into a handsome young rooster. The protective role of the mother hen is stressed, and the family are shown interacting with each other and their outdoor environment. Color. How Your Pet Grows Series. Random House. SF487.5.B87.

Life Cycles Puzzle & Book Series

Chicken & Egg Set. Explore how chicks grow and change with this easy-to-read photo book and puzzle. The book is packed with big, full-color photos that show, step by step, the life cycle of a chick. When children finish the book, they can test what they've learned by piecing together the Giant Matching Chicken Photo Puzzle. The entire series consists of 4 sets including Tadpole & Frog, Butterfly & Caterpillar, Plant & Bean, and **Chicken & Egg**. Each 48-

piece floor puzzle measures an enormous 1' x 6'. Each set includes a 25-page book. Order *Chicken & Egg Set* (JD203) from Lakeshore. Ph: 800-421-5354. Each set $17.95. Complete set $65.00.

Life Cycle Posters

How a Chick Hatches. "A tadpole becomes a frog, a caterpillar changes into a butterfly, and a baby chick pecks its way into the world on this eyecatching set of posters. Each poster uses simple language to explain the amazing cycle of life, growth and transformation." Set of 3 posters; each 17" x 22". $6.95 per set. Order (#LC643) from Lakeshore. Ph: 1-800-421-5354.

Videodiscs

Life Cycles Videodisc. 4-College. A state-of-the-art database on reproductive biology. "Animal and plant reproduction comes to life in 4,000 color images, computer graphics, illustrations, and vivid footage from the acclaimed Oxford Scientific Films." The disc is fully indexed in a 200-page directory. Includes the complete life cycle of chickens and many other birds and other animals. Topics: Territorial behavior, courtship, nest-building, metamorphosis, mating, birthing, pollination, budding, cell division. Order videodisc and directory for $295, optional MediaMAX Software for $199, and optional associated context module with slide show & suggested activities for $49 from Videodiscovery. Ph: 1-800-548-3472.

Karen Davis

Videos

Chick, Chick, Chick, by Mick and Bob Brown. K-12. Color. Lively natural sounds without commentary. Mimetic musical accompaniment. VHS. 12 1/2 min. This careful observation of chicks, hens, and roosters in an open farmyard shows chickens waking up, eating, drinking, dustbathing, and exploring their environment. It captures the chickens' verve including the speedy run of vigorous young chicks. The film cuts back and forth between the busy life of the family and flock migrating about the farm among fields and streams, and a hen quietly sitting on a clutch of eggs about to hatch. One egg actually does hatch on screen and we watch the chick, exhausted and wet, movingly emerge from its shell. It is important for the teacher to explain to the students that under normal (non-filmmaking) circumstances a mother hen would not leave her chicks to hatch unattended, but, rather, from the time she knows they are ready to hatch, she sits patiently until all of her chicks have emerged from the eggs underneath her, which may take as long as two days. Order (#80537-HAVT) for $49.95 from Society for Visual Education. Ph: 800-829-1900; fax: 800-624-1678.

Animals Families Series – The Chicken. Color. 33 videos. Each video avg. 11 min. VHS. Teacher's Guides. Each program in this comprehensive, absorbing series focuses on a particular animal family. Animals include Ants, Dolphins, Ducks, Ladybird Beetles, Monkeys, **Chickens**, and others. Students learn about the animals' natural habitats, life cycles, eating habits, and more, and gain a sense of appreciation for the variety of life in nature. Order (#98352-HAVT for *The Chicken*; 98370-HAVT for the complete *Animal Families Series*) from Society for Visual Education. Ph: 800-829-1900; fax: 800-629-1678. Each video $35.00. Complete series $975.00.

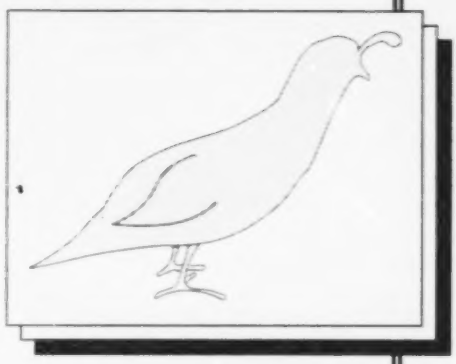
Microslide Lesson Sets

The Chick Embryo. K-6. While the primary mode of use of Microslide materials is for individualized study, Microslides can be projected so that the entire class can view them at once. The filmstrip can be cut up and used to make individual 35 mm slides. Micromounts (a safe, versatile alternative to glass slides) are an inexpensive and simple way to do this. Slides show a chick embryo at 13 hrs, 18 hrs, 21 hrs, 28 hrs, 38 hrs, 48 hrs, 56 hrs, and 96 hrs. *The Chick Embryo* includes a Microslide Viewer, Micromounts, Interactive CD-Rom computer disk, Teacher's Guide, and Student Worksheets. For current prices, contact National Teaching Aids, a subsidiary of American Educational Products. Ph: 800-289-9299; fax: 970-484-1198.

Classroom Activities

Where does the chick belong? This activity is perfect for young children. After studying chick development in different media, provide each child or group of children with pictures of specific stages of a chick's development. Each stage must have very definite physical signs for recognition. For instance, day 1, when the egg has been laid and the yolk is clear; day 3, when blood vessels begin to show; day 6, when the eye and beak appear; day 9, when the chick looks like a little bird; and day 18, when the chick is developed and almost ready to hatch. Now have the students draw a series of empty egg shells and label each one for a particular embryonic stage, including a final picture of a hen and a rooster and one or more chicks so the students see that chickens have families like people. Now ask the students to place each picture inside each egg in the correct developmental order.

This activity can be done as a competition and adapted to other species. Students can do it as a sequence book in which they illustrate and label the life-cycle sequence of a particular plant or animal, including humans. They can extend their study of life cycles to include individual and family behavior in various stages of life.



Other media can also be used. Students can create representations of chicks or other animals or plants at various stages of gestation using clay, play dough, or some other medium.

Create a Big Book, Color Poster, or Story. Students might retell parts of the *Home for Henny* story or the *Chester the Chick* story and illustrate is with drawings, clip art or magazine photos for a Big Book. Based on their reading, a 3rd-grade class in Michigan did an illustrated Big Book entitled *Do Chickens Sit in Trees?* (Many people are surprised to learn, Yes, they do!) Each student contributed a page with a colorful drawing accompanied by a short verbal description of a single chicken behavior/characteristic.

Students could do a color poster of a yard full of chickens, including insects, worms, songbirds, and other likely inhabitants. The poster should depict chickens foraging in the yard, perched on tree branches, entering their coop, dustbathing, nesting, and roosting, with each student contributing a unique section of the total composition.

In addition, each student could develop a story about one of the other chickens mentioned in *A Home for Henny* or *Chester the Chicken*. The main character would be expected to illustrate what the student had learned about chickens so far, while emphasizing the fact that each member of a "supporting cast" is also a main character with his or her own personal drama.

Design Your Own "Egg to Chick" Video Game. A Japanese company recently showed the immense popularity of a hand-held chicken video game based on a computerized chicken that grows to an adult bird after hatching from an egg. On the display screen, an egg hatches and a chick is born as the game begins. The operator pushes three small buttons to feed, play with, and clean up after the growing chick. The video game can continue for several days if the chicken is cared for properly and grows. If the person forgets to feed the chick, the baby bird emits a loud "peep, peep, peep" of complaint. An ignored chicken grows sickly and angry-looking, and eventually will die of neglect, ending the game. However, a well-cared for chicken looks happy, thrives and grows. A Japanese toy company, Bandai Co. (which also makes Power Rangers) introduced this "cute little egg" video game in November 1996 for about $17.00. It was an instant success. Do a project in which you and your students create your own computerized chick whose virtual life reflects the care it receives.

Teaching Responsible Care. To teach students of all ages the importance of responsible animal care, include lessons about providing a permanent loving home for a creature who already needs a home by adopting an animal from a shelter. Students who have a companion dog, cat or bird they truly cherish could bring this animal into class for a short presentation that teaches not only care but caring.

Include a field trip for students 4th grade and up to the local animal shelter and let them see for themselves the unwanted animals being killed there. With so much at stake, it is important for students to see what actually happens to the majority of animals who end up at a shelter. If they see the reality, they will be much less eager to add yet another animal to a world already filled with unwanted animals and the daily job of killing them.

Journals, Interviews, Speakers. Ask slightly older students to keep a journal about the life experiences of a young sibling, cousin, or neighbor. Have them interview or invite to class a pre-schooler, a teenager, a parent, and a senior citizen and then develop a verbal model of human developmental stages based on the different age groups.

Karen Davis

Order or make copies of this guide for the students to discuss. One teacher writes, "I let the children read your *REPLACING SCHOOL HATCHING PROJECTS* guide and it started a conversation that hasn't stopped for 2 weeks!"

Ecology Projects

Cornell Lab of Ornithology, an international bird-study center, offers free advice and information to teachers and others on birds and specializes in direct observation programs. (1) Project PigeonWatch teaches students about the courtship behavior and coloration of pigeons and the process of science. (2) Project FeederWatch is used by teachers to excite children about birds and the natural world and to assist in

the gathering of important data by investigating "an array of natural mysteries while participating in Project FeederWatch." Contributed by educators across the continent, the class activities are "designed to strengthen such skills as observation, identification, research, computation, writing, creativity, and more." (3) Classroom Feeder Watch is a complete curriculum especially designed for students in grades 5 through 8. "Built around the basic Project FeederWatch protocols for watching feeders, identifying birds, and collecting data, CFW includes core explorations in which students learn bird biology, collect and analyze data, and write reports based on their own questions and findings." $195.00 includes all curriculum materials. Inquire about multiple classroom discounts. Call 800-843-BIRD (2473); 607-254-2440. Fax 607-254-2415. Email: birdeducation@cornell.edu

Build a bird house. "When students build bird houses, they learn a practical lesson about habitat." Schools in one Ohio community have taught their students about birds by having the students build bird houses for a local park. The students built wood-duck and bluebird houses and observed the families of birds who took up residence in these boxes from a respectful distance using binoculars. For a detailed look at this project including how to build nesting boxes, see "Science – It's for the Birds!" *Science and Children* (NSTA journal) Nov.-Dec. 1995: 16-19. This project can be done in conjunction with Cornell's Classroom Feederwatch.

National Audubon Society. **Audubon Adventures** is an environmental education program for children in grades 4 to 6. It presents fascinating facts about birds, wildlife, and their habitats. "It comes to you packaged as a Classroom Kit (serving 32 students) or Individual Kit (serving 1 student). The program is used by classroom teachers, after-school program coordinators, special education instructors, language arts teachers, and homeschoolers." Classroom Kit $35.00. Individual Kit $22.00. Available in English and Spanish. To order call 800-813-5037; 212-979-3183; 212-979-3000. kstram@audubon.org

Avian Ecology, Humane Bird Study, & More . . .

Bird Watching as an Alternative to Chick Hatching for grades two through six. Illustrations. Glossary. Bibliography. This 24-page curriculum unit was prepared by elementary-school teachers for publication by the United Federation of Teachers Humane Education Committee in New York City. It comprises hands-on class projects and teaching ideas developed through teachers conferences, workshops, and direct classroom experiences. The unit is designed to involve "young students in the exciting, highly motivating, and often awe-inspiring study of birds in their natural environments." It lists stimulating science fair projects. Each activity in this unit includes a Performance Objective, Materials Needed, Motivation, and Activities. $2.00 each. $1.00 each for 5 or more copies per order. Order from United Poultry Concerns, P.O. Box 150, Machipongo, VA 23405 (757-678-7875); or from Humane Education Committee, P.O. Box 445, New York, NY 10028 (212-410-3095). Or click on & download from www.uft.org/humane.

Alice Aronson

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